

28 Apr 1970

To Weisberg & Roffman

Dear Harold/Howard

I have a bit of time now and can add an installment to my last letter and hopefully catch up on correspondence. I'm reading term papers and grading exams these days, so nearly all of my time is taken.

Merriman Smith: I have UPI's account of the suicide, and can add a trifle more to what I said before. UPI says he shot himself in a bathroom adjoining his bedroom. This would make it all the more likely that the sound was muffled sufficiently that it was not noticed as a gunshot. The bedroom would act as an additional muffling chamber.

Nichols: As I indicated to Harold previously, I cannot justifiably complain about my relationship with Nichols, since I sent him my material with the understanding that he could use it as he wished in his suit. This suited him well enough so that there was no need for underhanded tactics, so for the most part he has acted above board with me.

His behavior toward Harold ^{is} ~~seems~~ abominable, however. I thought that some of Harold's attitude might have stemmed from a misunderstanding, but Nichols' failure to respond to Harold's legitimate questions casts considerable doubt on his good intent. It appears that Nichols is out to serve himself without regard for others. I believe he is giving thought neither to what good he can do for others, not to the harm that he can cause them.

I think, however, that the misidentification of Harold's 399-base photo is the fault of Archives, not of Nichols.

Roffman-Nichols memo:

Pine boards photo: I have seen this meaningless contraption. Howard did well to put N down with reference to CBS and WC tests. I did the same when I wrote to him about that "demonstration". It is utterly worthless.

bullet deformation: This experiment demonstrates what is already obvious to anyone knowing about firearms and ballistics. Valuable for illustration only.

399 "ridge"/"notch": I am afraid that I will not get this clear in my mind until it is properly described to me, or see a picture of quality comparable to Harold's. I have not seen this yet, so I must still suggest (without insisting) that you are both wrong.

When I get time, I'll try to get this from Archives, if they have not yet completely muddled their photos.

Howard: Nichols' copyright of Archives photos does not deny anyone the right to get copies for his own use. I believe it would ~~den~~ deny you the right to publish it without permission, but possession of the photo is unrestricted. Archives normally insists that photos be taken with government camera, gov't film, and by gov't photographer-- so that the gov't can own and control the pictures. Copyright does make possible certain restrictions, but none that keep you from getting a copy for your own use.

* Howard: in future, number your pages. On things that require detailed answer, also number your paragraphs.

p2 composition of bullets: composition varies from manufacturer to manufacturer. I would not regard N's figures seriously, unless he specified what manufacturer, or at least what type of bullet.

Fisher & neck fragments: It was my understanding that Panel saw only A-P views. What does it mean when F says fragments were "stretched out in a path across the neck"? Did he mean that the "path" was aligned laterally from left to right? The wording is what I can't understand.

6.5mm frag. in head: When I first learned of this I considered that it reached the back of the head from the front. Why don't you think of it likewise?

What bothered me about this is that no previous account mentioned it. ~~xx~~ As indicated in my letter to Wecht, some things seem definitely to indicated it was not in JFK head X-rays. Humes and Kellerman in testimony indicate that Humes went after the two fragments in the head because they were large enough to be recovered. I gather from that testimony that these were the largest fragments in the head; the reason Humes went for these in particular (after seeing X-rays) is because they were larger than other frags and he thought he could get them out with no trouble. Review Humes and Kellerman on this, and you will see what I mean; that if there had been a 6.5 mm frag visible in the head X-rays, Humes would have gone for it. It is a sizable chunk in comparison with the tiny bits that Humes did remove.

Wecht's response to my letter did not shake my growing conviction that head X-rays were substituted. I had originally rejected that notion because I thought it too easy to identify the Skull of JFK, and that ~~xx~~ would-be substituters would not want to run such a risk. But maybe the condition of the head was such that the risk of detection was worth it. I don't want to insist that there was a substitution, but I think it worthwhile to consider it a strong possibility. As indicated in my letter to Wecht, the indications are strong, irrespective of my erroneous hunch.

p3 Cartridge cases: "Making Frazier look bad" is the only legitimate use to which this material can be put. Presently I can't see anything in them that suggests further use, but this is valuable enough. By itself and in combination with other things it is enough to have Frazier discredited (disqualified?) as an expert.

Cocking M-C rifle: Nichols' observation is true, but not as important as he indicates. I don't mean to disparage; only to indicate that this matter does not merit special emphasis.

Lung damage: I have long believed that the lung was penetrated, and, as you know, I strongly suspect that a bullet was removed. You are right to gather every bit of evidence bearing on this, for I think it important.

JBC chest X-rays: We have the sworn testimony of one of the Parkland docs (Shires?) that there was a fragment on the rib. I see no reason to credit Nichols' account as refutation of that.

JBC wrist fragments: I have long been searching for more metal than is accounted for in the official record. I thought it had turned up in Curry's flub-a-dub fragment, for it suited what I had in mind. I still think fragments missing-- maybe stuff that ended up on the floor of the car. That's a guess, of course, so I don't push it. This would not be one of the fragments "found" in the car.

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Cartridge cases: Unless Nichols has done some work that he hasn't told me about, his statement that he discovered the cause of the should dents is a lie. I do not know the cause of the shoulder dents, and I believe he doesn't either. He knows my extreme interest in these, so I think if he had done anything he would have told me.

He had absolutely nothing to do with explaining the case mouth dents-- not the correct explanation anyway. That was first done by a gun buff in Maryland in the presence of me and Harold, and later at Harold's place I made similar dents under conditions more closely simulating what is normal. To my knowledge, all that Nichols knows about matters relating to the cartridge cases comes from me alone, and not at all from his own work, except in so far as he has done certain things in accordance with my directions.

I told Nichols he could use that material in any way he saw fit in his suit-- ~~xxxx~~ carte blanche. His copyrighting the material is not a matter of concern to me, nor would I be concerned if he declined to give me credit publicly. It bothers me, however, that privately he lies to my friends about it, for I am anxious to gain some standing with them. With statements such as N's, it appears that I am the liar.

Anyway, this will tell you something about Nichols.

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Minutiae: The plural of minutia is minutiae, and it is an understatement to say that N is deficient in his knowledge of the Minutiae. From personal experience I know that he is deficient in his knowledge of the case as a whole. It's a fault that stems from believing that you can understand all of a particular aspect by concentrating only on the aspect in question. The soundest procedure in considering the assassination is to examine not the evidence itself, but how the "investigators" treat the evidence. It is in this regard that most experts in special fields are deficient. They regard this case like all others of its type, but it is not possible to come to the truth until you begin regarding the case like no others of its type, for what in many cases appears to be evidence is not evidence of anything but trickery.

The surest and fastest way to get to the truth is to investigate the investigators.

Anyway, I have not treated Nichols as one who understands ~~that~~ the case, for I know that he does not.

The rest of what N said is not of much new value.

I must again cut a letter short and promise to say more soon.

Still,

Dick